Economy and verb movement: the diachronic perspective

Francesco Pinzin[1] & Cecilia Poletto[1,2]
[1]Goethe Universität Frankfurt am Main, [2]Università degli Studi di Padova
Pinzin@em.uni-frankfurt.de, Poletto@em.uni-frankfurt.de

In this work we investigate a syntactic change that can be seen as an effect of economy of movement, i.e., the way a V2 syntax is lost by progressively reducing the movement span of the inflected verb inside a split left periphery (Rizzi 1997, Benincà & Poletto 2004). The loss of V2 correlates with the rise of Infinitival Anteposition (IA) – the anteposition of infinitival forms (Inf) to modals (Mod), see (1) – across a series of Old Venetian (OVec) texts from the early XIV to the early XVI c.

(1)   se […]   no   entrometerà poi **entrometere** no   **porà**
      if   *not* *sue.FUT*   *then* *sue.INF*   *not* *can.FUT*
      'if […] they will not sue, they will not be able to sue.' (Stat. Ven. 4, 19)

The texts displaying the properties of a V2 grammar – V2 restriction, subject inversion, main/embedded asymmetry, enclisis to the finite verb (Benincà 2004) – show no cases of IA. The texts which do not display such properties allow for IA, with an increase toward the end of the period. The properties of IA are illuminating in explaining why this is so. With IA, only negative and impersonal clitics may intervene between Inf and Mod, so that Inf and Mod must be close. Additionally, the absence of main/embedded asymmetry and the order complementizers/ topic/focus > Inf indicate that Inf sits in the low extreme of the CP, possibly in a ground position.

(2)   [$_{ForceP}$ [$_{TopP}$ [$_{FocP}$ [$_{GroundP}$ far [$_{FinP}$ debia [$_{TP}$ ~~debia~~ … [$_{vP}$ ~~far~~] …]

This explains the inverse correlation with V2. Suppose that XIII/early XIV c. OVen is a "Force-V2" language (very spare attestations of V3). In such a configuration, the inflected V would always bypass GroundP, the landing position of Inf in (2), accounting for the lack of IA. When V-to-Force is being lost, the reduced movement span of the inflected verb makes room for the surfacing of IA. This shows that the loss of V2 does not occur abruptly but in a stepwise fashion (Poletto 1998) providing us with a window on how economy applies to language change.

References: • Benincà, P. (2004). The Left Periphery of Medieval Romance. *Studi Linguistici E Filologici Online* 2 (2), 243–297. • Benincà. P & C. Poletto (2004). Topic, Focus, and V2. In L. Rizzi (ed.), *The Structure of CP and IP*. Oxford: OUP, 52–75. • Poletto, C. (1998). L'inversione interrogativa come "verbo secondo residuo": l'analisi sincronica proiettata nella diacronia. In P. Ramat & Roma (eds.), *Atti del XXX convegno della Società di Linguistica Italiana*. Roma: Bulzoni, 311–327. • Rizzi, L. (1997). The Fine Structure of the Left Periphery. In L. Haegeman (ed.), *Elements of Grammar: Handbook of Generative Grammar*. Dordrecht: Kluwer, 281–338.